

Reverse Déjà Vu

by Paul S. Meyer

When the first impression is so deep, there are some things you never forget. And so I was not surprised at the rush of feelings that accompanied my return to the driver's compartment of a tank after an absence of over thirty years.

The reclining position was new, and different from what I had experienced in familiarization with M48s and M60s, and so were the controls, but the white paint, the responsiveness and sound of the engine (even though turbine instead of diesel piston), and the feeling of the vehicle moving over the gently rolling terrain remained the same.

Our crew had just engaged several enemy tanks with success, and the commander wanted us positioned just to the left of a burning vehicle near the rise of a hill. "Defilade?" I asked over the intercom.

Hearing no answer, I took that position, and because the rise was steep I was looking at blue sky through my three periscopes. "Move up a bit further, driver," came the command, so I did, and now could see the terrain ahead.

To my great surprise we faced, alone, a battalion-sized advance by the enemy. The commander began to engage an enemy tank to the left, and succeeded after firing several rounds. But this did not make a dent in the force to our right which was coming at us now with considerable speed.

Just as I was going to ask the commander about a retrograde move, a round hit, the sound of the engine spooling down could be heard and the master light came on. "I'm getting the master light and warning lights," I told the commander on the intercom, "I think we're down." Before any answer could be made, the sound of another hit followed, shaking the inside of my compartment and everything inside went dark.

I could see my mistakes almost as I had committed them, as well as those of the commander. I didn't need an after-action review, but it would be useful.

I later realized that this tank, I think an M1, had a two speed reverse, as well as combat idle which I could have employed, and while I was concerned about taking the main tube off target by moving (on 48s and 60s you didn't fire the main gun on the move), I think there are gyro mechanisms to manage that on this vehicle. Anyway, moving to another position would have been the right thing to do, to enable us to continue to fight. We had mobility but didn't use it, in part because I was waiting for an order from the commander, and in part because he was busy and I was out of the loop.

The elements of this exercise kept playing through my mind for days after the 1995 Armor Conference, and left me with the desire to do it again, to do it



right, to try this problem over in different ways, and to try other problems.

And I could have, too, because did I mention that this tank was a simulator? Yes, the view through the periscopes was computer generated, but real enough, and in fact so convincing that while the simulator is stationary, you "feel" motion because the view through the periscopes is your only reference to the outside. You get caught up in, and taken over by, the situation. Action sounds could be both heard and felt in the driver's compartment.

It's true that nothing can replace actual maneuver in a tank in the field, with other tanks and troops, as we did in AOB 11 in 1963, firing blanks in the main gun during problems, or firing real rounds from the main gun on Hackett or Dorrets Ranges as we did.

But Simnet provides reality enough that the pressure builds and my hands began to sweat. And it also provides the opportunity to see the whole battlefield from an aerial view, and to replay a situation. It also provides a common, integrated experience for the whole crew which can be fully observed by instructors, and that facilitates rapid learning.

Weeks later I still can't get the exercise out of my mind, and continue to revisit the experience. I wish we had it in 1963.

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